

PLYMOUTH, NH AG PRODUCERS BENEFIT FROM UNIQUE MARKETING PROGRAM

Outline of Need:

Due to a mutual interest in energy conservation and renewable energy, staff from the D Acres Organic Farm and Educational Homestead joined the Plymouth Area Renewable Energy Initiative (PAREI), a local group organized to encourage energy conservation, energy efficiency practices and to promote the use of renewable energy. They began to discuss ways to support local agriculture and at the same time, reduce energy consumption by reducing the number of miles food travels. They had recently learned that the average piece of food on one's dinner plate traveled 1500 miles!

PAREI soon learned that the small, local agricultural producers in their area put their effort into growing crops and run out of time when it comes to marketing them. They needed assistance developing a stronger demand, however, they were unlikely to have the resources to set up a website to sell them. Many attend local farmers markets, but this does not guarantee sales. Likewise, local consumers did not have the time or gas money to visit all the farms to purchase products or attend the farmers' markets.

How RD Helped:

USDA Rural Development provided PAREI with a \$3,445 Rural Business Enterprise Grant to launch *Local Foods Plymouth (LFP)*, an on-line ordering and purchasing project, promoting food that is grown and/or produced in the Plymouth, NH region which included the greater Plymouth area and 21 surrounding towns. The initiative was also supported by a \$1,000 grant from the NH Department of Agriculture and many hours of in-kind services from the staff and volunteers of D Acres and PAREI.

The on-line purchasing system [www.lfp.dacres.org/] allowed farmers and emerging businesses to inform the public about products available in a given week. Buyers could then purchase the items online prior to the food being harvested and delivered to the *LFP* table at the Plymouth Farmers' Market. Information from several producers would be updated each week on one website, thus allowing the consumer to order many items at once and pick up all the items at one location. Farmers benefited by saving labor and money by knowing exactly how much pre-bought produce to harvest. Buyers would benefit by knowing exactly what products would be waiting for them at the market and save time and energy through one stop shopping – reducing the number of trips to various locations to pick up local produce.

Result:



During the first season, 12 local farmers and emerging businesses used the new site to “sell” their flowers, baked goods and meat, generating \$6,805 in sales. A total of 75 different buyers generated 338 orders throughout the 15 week session. One of the goals of *LFP* was to introduce the community to local products and producers. A survey of participants at the Farmers Market indicated that it was *LFP* that brought them to the market and that 73% of those first time visitors also visited other vendors at the market.

In addition, the pilot project attracted an enthusiastic response by national media outlets, including National Public Radio and the Associated Press, which spread word of this new innovative on-line project that promoted local food buying and energy conservation. Local *LFP* participants were swarmed by reporters and writers during several of the Thursday pick-ups. People from all over New Hampshire, New England and the country have contacted *LFP* to find out how they can implement the project in their own communities. A subsequent project of *LFP*, also supported by USDA Rural Development, will create a training package that will be available to other communities.